

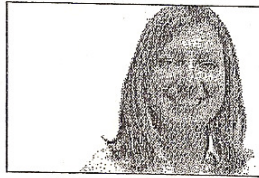
# Dealing with gypsy moths in your backyard

Gypsy moths are a nuisance every summer, but this year populations seem to be especially high in our area. Gypsy moths are one of the most damaging pests of hardwood trees. They prefer to feast on the leaves of oak, crab apple, apple, willow, aspen, birch, basswood, linden, and tamarack trees, but will also snack on hundreds of different trees and shrubs. Gypsy moths are not a native insect. They were introduced into the United States in 1869 by a French scientist. The first outbreak occurred out east in 1889. The moths spread further south and west, and today many states, including Wisconsin, are dealing with this pest.

Gypsy moths have four different life stages. Caterpillars hatch in early to mid-May and feed through June. Pupae are similar to cocoon, and are present from late June to late July. Adult moths emerge from pupae in mid-July to late July, and can be seen until late August. Egg masses are laid in late July and August and will hatch the following May.

The first line of defense against gypsy moths is to keep trees and shrubs healthy. Gypsy moths will devour leaves off of the trees, and the extent of damage they will do varies. A tree that is less than 50 percent defoliated will experience only a slight reduction in growth. Trees with more than 50 percent of leaves eaten will often re-foliate by mid-summer. Healthy trees can usually withstand two consecutive years of more than 50 percent defoliation without causing permanent damage. Trees that are weak, stressed, or in a drought year can be damaged or killed by just one defoliation of more than 50 percent. Keeping trees healthy can help them withstand a few bad years of gypsy moths.

A way to prevent the caterpillars from getting to the leaves is to put up 'sticky bands'. On dry bark, about chest high, wrap duct tape around a tree. Make the strip about



Abby Huibregtse

5 inches wide, and tuck the tape into the folds of the bark. Smear Tanglefoot (available at garden centers) on the tape. Check the tape regularly and replace as needed.

You can also use 'burlap bands' to catch older caterpillars when they crawl down the tree as evening approaches. Cut a strip of burlap 12 to 18 inches wide and long enough to go around the tree. Wrap the burlap about chest high (or just above the 'sticky band' if one is in place). Tie a string around the burlap six inches from the top edge. Let those six inches flap over. Check the bands in the late afternoon, collect caterpillars (but wear gloves, because the hairs on them can cause a rash on human skin) and drop them in soapy water.

These and other methods work well when populations are sparse. In years when gypsy moths are abundant, chemical sprays may be necessary. For small trees, you can purchase pesticides and spray them yourself, following label directions. For tall trees or densely forested areas, a hired applicator should be used.

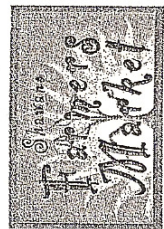
Gypsy moth infestations tend to go in cycles. One year gypsy moths can be scarce, followed by a few years of dense populations. If you think you have gypsy moths and want more information on treatment suggestions, you can contact your local Extension office. More information about gypsy moth identification, treatment, quarantine areas, and aerial spray schedules can be found on the Wisconsin DNR website or by calling 1-800-642-MOTH.

Abby Huibregtse is the agriculture agent for UW-Extension in Oconto County.

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